



IMMACULATA

Who are you, Lord; and who am I?

Newsletter of Immaculata Fraternity, Fredericksburg, Virginia



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Wallace family crèche



January Feast Days for Secular Franciscans

Thomas of Celano's story of the first crèche

The joyful day approached. The Franciscans were called from many communities. The men and women of the neighborhood, as best they could, prepared candles and torches to brighten the night. Finally the Saint of God arrived, found everything prepared, saw it and rejoiced. The crib was made ready, hay was brought, the ox and ass were led to the spot and Greccio became a new Bethlehem. The night was radiant with joy. The crowds drew near and rejoiced in the novelty of the celebration. Their voices resounded from the woods, and the rocky cliff echoed the jubilant outburst. As they sang in the praise of God, the whole night rang with exultation. The Saint of God stood before the crib, overcome with devotion and wondrous joy. A solemn Mass was sung at the crib.

The Saint was dressed in deacon's vestments, for a deacon he was [out of humility, St. Francis never became a priest, remaining a deacon all his life]. He sang the Gospel. Then he preached a delightful sermon to the people who stood around him, speaking about the nativity of the poor King and the humble town of Bethlehem.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux:

Glory of the Son — Honor of the Mother

“Let us not imagine that we obscure the glory of the Son by the great praise we lavish on the Mother; for the more she is honored, the greater is the glory of her Son. There can be no doubt that whatever we say in praise of the Mother gives equal praise to the Son.”



- 3. Bl. Chriatiane Menaburi, virgin, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1310
- 4. Bl. Angela de Foligno, widow, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1310
- 10. Bl. Gregory X, Pope, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1276
- 15. Bl. Jacques del Piebe, priest, Franciscan Third Order Secular, martyr d. 1304
- 16. Sts. Berard and Companions, Franciscan Protomartyrs, d. 1220
- 18. Bl. Jeanne of Saint Mary, virgin, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1360
- 21. Bl. Joseph Nascimbeni, priest, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1922
- 22. St. Vincent Pallotti, priest, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1850
- 24. Bl. Paule Gamgara Costa, widow, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1515
- 25. Bl. Emmanuel Dominguo y Sol, priest, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1909
- 26. Bl. Georges Matulwicz, Bishop, Franciscan Third Order Secular, d. 1927
- 29. St. Francis de Sales, Bishop, Doctor of the Church, Codbearer, d. 1622



Milestones

Fraternity Birthday

Doug Chute January 16



CRNJ Lady Altar

Minister Message

In early December I attended a one-day Advent Retreat at the Oratory chapel of the Canons Regular of the New Jerusalem in Charles Town, WV. It was a beautiful, restful and inspiring day, and I experienced some very special moments close to Christ -- sublime moments when the tensions and noise of the outside world fell away in the quiet, holy space of prayer, sacrament and liturgy. I'll try to briefly explain.

The silent men's retreat started with morning Mass and ended with Vespers in the afternoon. In between, the Canons offered two talks, and Confession was available to attendees during the day. We shared a meal en masse, and the rest of our time was devoted to silent reflection and prayer.

Midday, I sat in a side chapel pew and prayed a Rosary, dedicating each decade for the healing of someone I know who is ill with cancer (okay, I threw my name in there, too!). I finished the Rosary and was kneeling near a statue of the Sacred Heart. The side altar (called the "Lady Altar" for the Canons' patron, Our Lady of Walsingham) has its icons of Our Lady and of Christ Pantocrator. There is a golden reliquary. Candles are lit. Silence. I sensed warmth emanating from all around me, as if I were basking in Divine Love.

Thoughts on the Season

This morning, looking out the bedroom window, a beautiful sunrise begins to fill the sky -- a reminder that God has blessed us with another day. As we go through life, isn't it amazing how easy it is to take it for granted and turn away from needing our Lord's daily guidance?



During this season, slow down, focus more on being responsive to our Lord's promptings. Ask Him whom you need to reach out to and be an example of loving kindness today. Sometimes going back to basics and just baking cookies to share with family and neighbors is all He wants you to do today.

It's so easy to get bowed down with materialistic views. Maybe you have an extra coat in the closet that needs a new home or a blanket put away in storage. As I go through the "stuff" I have accumulated over the years, I am humbled that I wasted so many hours shopping! Go back to basics and clean out a closet and give to those in need this Christmas season. Help your kids go through the toys they no longer play with and give them away.

It may take a day out of your hectic schedule, just think of the smile on our Lord's face. :) What a special birthday present for Him! After all, we have just celebrated Jesus' birthday, right?

— Maggie Fischer, OFS

I moved back to a central pew in the main chapel where I had left a small book (*Franciscan Mysticism* ©1928 by Brother Boniface Maes, OFM), brought for reading and reflection during the retreat. I opened the book and my eyes fell on a quote offered by Br. Maes from St. Jerome, "A man strays from the divine love according to the measure in which he takes pleasure in inferior things."

It seemed at that moment that I could perceive such Divine Love because I wasn't indulging in "inferior things" at my retreat time. The life of our father in faith St. Francis was soaked in Divine Love, and he had little attachment for created things -- not even for his own body. And as Br. Maes wrote, "...the saints deprived themselves of anything that could give them pleasure...to be able to spend themselves solely in doing the good pleasure of God."

In retreats, I've felt that the so-called "Real World" I would return to is actually artificial, the artifice of human preference for, and fixation on, the transient, the sinful and the worldly. The true world of Divine Love can sometimes be found in places like that little side chapel in West Virginia, or in any place where we think/pray/adore and otherwise spend ourselves "solely in doing the good pleasure of God."

— Skip Wallace, OFS